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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/09/2017

TAGS: KPKO MOPS UN SY LE IS

SUBJECT: UNTSO: GOLAN UNDER CONTROL, SOUTHERN LEBANON  
DANGEROUS BUT MANAGED

REF: 05 TEL AVIV 6262

Classified By: Ambassador Richard H. Jones, Reasons 1.4 (b) (d)

¶1. (U) The commander of United Nations Treaty Supervision Organization (UNTSO), Major General Ian Gordon (Australia), called on the Ambassador on August 8 to discuss the situation on the ground in his areas of operation, particularly the Lebanese-Israeli border and the Golan Heights. UNTSO is an unarmed military observer (MIOB) force with troops seconded to both UNIFIL in Lebanon and UNDOF in the Golan Heights. It also maintains three MILOBs in the Sinai.

¶2. (C) Gordon described the Golan Heights as an interesting study in controlled stability. He said there are some violations, but they are all minor and reciprocal, with each side mirroring the other's escalations and reductions. UNTSO has recently noted increased Israeli brigade-size combined arms training, as well as the reinforcement of tank positions and other structures, which Gordon believes is to address problems with preparedness and joint operations revealed in the Second Lebanon War. Syria has responded with smaller-scale, company-size to battalion-level group training. Gordon believes the IDF is tailoring their assessments of the Golan Heights to different audiences, talking of pending war to "those who give it money" while giving an outlook of peace to neighbors, including Syria, and the international community.

¶3. (C) In southern Lebanon, Gordon described the situation as largely controlled but not safe. He said the recent launching of two missiles into Israel and the bombing of Spanish peacekeepers were an embarrassment to Hizballah, which claims to be the sole power in southern Lebanon. The Ambassador asked if UNTSO thought Hizballah was behind the attack on the peacekeepers, as many in the GOI now believe. UNTSO Senior Advisor Francesco Manca, who accompanied Gordon, said that they had no evidence Hizballah was involved, but noted it was not unusual for Hizballah to occasionally allow other terrorist organizations limited action to demonstrate that chaos would follow if Hizballah were forced out of southern Lebanon.

¶4. (C) UN PKO has asked Gordon if UNTSO could monitor Shebaa Farms once an agreement was in place, and Gordon believes they could. Gordon said there has been no talk of UNTSO involvement in monitoring smuggling on the Lebanese-Syrian border, but that their mandate is broad enough to allow it. He noted that UNTSO's unarmed observers, their long-standing reputation for neutrality, and their good relations with both Beirut and Damascus, where they have had offices for fifty years, could make them a less-threatening option than UNIFIL.

¶5. (C) COMMENT: In addition to addressing identified

shortfalls as Gordon described, the Israeli maneuvers around the Golan Heights are likely intended to send a message to Syria that Israel has not lost its deterrent ability or resolve following the Second Lebanon War. MG Gordon also did not discuss the deployment and alert level of Syrian rocket installations, located further from the Golan Heights disengagement area, which are the primary Israeli concern.

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